



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

September 10, 1999

1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Fisheries Division
Endangered Species Coordinator
Nongame Coordinator
Kalispell Office

Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Lake County Conservation District, P.O. Box 766, Polson, MT 59860
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Mr. Bill Edelman, 1050 Spring Creek Road, Ronan, MT 59864
Mr. Les Evarts, P.O. Box 278, Pablo, MT 59855
City of Ronan, 109 2 Avenue SW, Ronan, MT 59864

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for a Future Fisheries Project tentatively planned to restore a 2,100 foot reach of Ronan Spring Creek to a more natural configuration. This proposed project is located at the southern edge of the Ronan city limits in Lake County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5 P.M., October 12, 1999 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Completion of this project is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432.

Sincerely,

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Bureau
Fisheries Division

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Ronan Spring Creek Channel Restoration Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 which directs the Department to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The program involves physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. This project is being proposed to restore 2,100 feet of Ronan Spring Creek to a proper dimension, pattern and profile. The intent is to provide for a greater diversity in fish habitat and to increase the competency of the channel to transport bedload. The project site, involving the city of Ronan and an adjacent landowner, is located at the southern edge of the Ronan city limits in Lake County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on Spring Creek located at the southern edge of the Ronan city limits within Township 20 North, Range 20 West, Section 2 in Lake County.

II. Need for the Project: Department Goal C indicates that a Fisheries Division objective is to "provide and support programs to conserve and enhance high quality aquatic habitat and protect native aquatic species." The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is a tool to help achieve that objective.

Ronan Spring Creek, within the city limits of Ronan, has been dredged and straightened in the past. On an adjacent property, the stream was converted to a maze of ponds and ditches in the 1970's in an attempt to raise hatchery trout. These past channel alterations have acted like sediment traps, resulting in the deposition of a substantial quantity of organic silts. Additionally, the riparian corridor has been denuded of most woody shrubs resulting in a lack of riparian shading on the stream. The over-widened channel, deposited sediment, and lack of shading has contributed to elevated water temperatures and reduced oxygen levels. Additionally, due to a lack of undercut banks, deep pools and overhead cover, this reach of stream provides very poor habitat for trout.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to restore a 2,100 foot reach of Ronan Spring Creek. The proposal calls for reshaping the channel into a more natural configuration, obliterating the hatchery ponds and associated ditches and planting riparian vegetation. Over-widened portions of the channel within the city limits would be narrowed and deepened to provide for fish habitat and additional competency to carry bedload. On the adjacent private property, a new, single-threaded, channel would be constructed through and between the maze of existing ditches and in-channel ponds. Woody riparian vegetation would be planted along the new stream corridor to help stabilize banks and initiate riparian recovery. This project is expected to cost \$19,500.00. Of this total,

the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$10,000.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Restoring the existing altered channel is expected to create a more healthy habitat for aquatic life by creating undercut banks, deep pools and over-hanging cover for trout and by improving the competency of the stream to move bedload. Expected improvements in the aquatic habitat should enhance resident trout populations in the stream. Habitat for riparian dependent wildlife would also be improved by enhancing the riparian vegetative community through planting a variety of vegetation along the stream margin.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, construction will occur during a low flow period and operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota. A 310 permit will be obtained from the local Conservation District. In the long term, restoring the existing channel would reduce the sediment contribution to downstream areas, thereby improving the overall quality of downstream waters.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be disturbed during construction of the new channel, but would quickly stabilize following proposed re-vegetation efforts. Overall, the project is expected to reduce bank erosion and improve channel stability.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Riparian vegetation and cover would be improved by planting a variety of riparian vegetation along the stream corridor.

5. Aesthetics.

Aesthetics would be enhanced by restoring an altered reach of stream to a more healthy and natural stream environment. The riparian vegetative community would be enhanced by planting a variety of vegetation along the margins of the channel.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The proposed project will likely require an individual Army Corp of Engineers 404 permit. Therefore, the State Historic Preservation Office has been contacted to determine the need for compliance with the federal historic preservation regulations. The project will not begin until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

Ronan Spring Creek is one of the more popular small streams for fishing in Lake County, especially by children. Restoration of 2,100 feet of stream would improve overall aquatic habitat and, consequently, would enhance trout populations residing in the stream. As a result, the recreational fishery is expected to improve. In association with the stream restoration proposal, the community also is planning to develop an educational display focusing on the values associated with restoring and protecting spring creeks. The property owner adjacent to the city limits has given the city of Ronan a permanent conservation easement, further insuring improved access to and quality of recreational resources created by this project.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, this segment of the Ronan Spring Creek will remain over-widened; resulting in the continued deposition of sediments, high water temperatures and low oxygen levels. This reach of altered stream will continue to provide poor habitat for aquatic life. Additionally, habitat for riparian dependent wildlife will remain in a degraded condition. Recreational opportunities associated with fish and wildlife resources will remain reduced and aesthetics will continue to be impaired.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to restore 2,100 feet of stream to a more natural configuration, creating more diversified fish habitat and providing a greater competency for the channel to move bedload. Restoration would involve narrowing and deepening an over-widened portion of the channel with the city reach and constructing a single-threaded channel through and between a maze of old ditches and hatchery ponds within the adjacent reach on private property. The planting of a variety of vegetation along the stream margin would create more diverse habitat for riparian dependent wildlife. This alternative would improve fish and wildlife habitat, aesthetics and water quality within the project area and would be expected to increase trout populations in the stream.

VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

1. Is an EIS required? No.

We conclude from this review that the proposed activities will have a positive impact on the physical and human environment.

2. Level of public involvement.

The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and will be contingent upon their approval. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter. The EA will be published on the Montana Electronic Bulletin Board.

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5 P.M. on October 12, 1999.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Bureau
Fisheries Division
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
Helena, MT 59620

Telephone: (406) 444-2432

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
 1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701
 (406) 444-2535

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title Ronan Spring Creek Channel Restoration Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement

Description of Project The project is being proposed to restore 2,100 feet of Ronan Spring Creek to a proper channel dimension, pattern and profile. The intent is to provide for greater diversity in trout habitat and for the efficient transport of bedload. The project site, involving the city of Ronan and an adjacent landowner, is located at the southern edge of the Ronan city limits in Lake County.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

| | MAJOR | MODERATE | MINOR | NONE | UNKNOWN | COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES |
|--|-------|----------|-------|------|---------|----------------------------|
| 1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats | | X | | | | X |
| 2. Water quality, quantity & distribution | | | X | | | X |
| 3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture | | | X | | | X |
| 4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality | | | X | | | X |
| 5. Aesthetics | | | X | | | X |
| 6. Air quality | | | | X | | |
| 7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources | | | | X | | |
| 8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy | | | | X | | |
| 9. Historical & archaeological sites | | | | X | | X |

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

| | MAJOR | MODERATE | MINOR | NONE | UNKNOWN | COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES |
|--|-------|----------|-------|------|---------|----------------------------|
| 1. Social structures & mores | | | | X | | |
| 2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity | | | | X | | |
| 3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue | | | | X | | |
| 4. Agricultural or industrial production | | | | X | | |
| 5. Human health | | | | X | | |
| 6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income | | | | X | | |
| 7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities | | | X | | | X |
| 8. Quantity & distribution of employment | | | | X | | |
| 9. Distribution & density of population & housing | | | | X | | |
| 10. Demands for government services | | | | X | | |
| 11. Industrial & commercial activity | | | | X | | |
| 12. Demands for energy | | | | X | | |
| 13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals | | | | X | | |
| 14. Transportation networks & traffic flows | | | | X | | |

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction Lake County Conservation District, NRCS, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corp of Engineers, Montana Department of

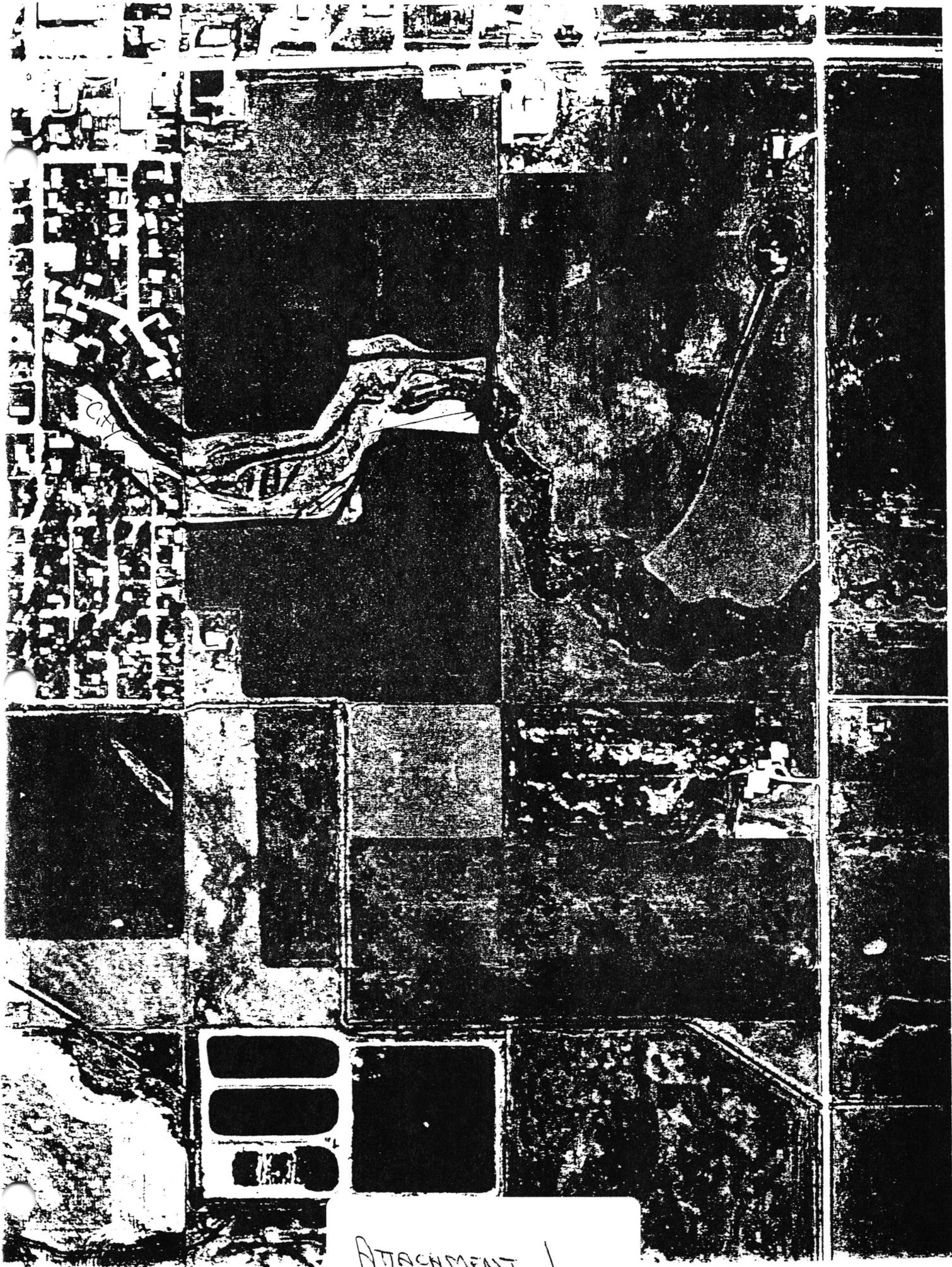
Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office, City of
Ronan

Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Bill Edelman, Lower
Flathead Valley Community Foundation; Les Evarts, confederated Salish
and Kootenai Tribes

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by : Mark Lere

Date: August 16, 1999



ATTACHMENT 1